

# **CITY OF WESTMINSTER**

## **SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY**

In the expanding world of electronic communication, social media can mean many things. In general, social media encompasses the various activities that integrate technology, social interaction, and content creation. Through social media, individuals can create web content; organize, edit, or comment on content; and/or combine and share content on their own web site or on someone else's. Social media uses many technologies and forms, including Web feeds, blogs, wikis, photography and video sharing, web logs, online journals or diaries, chat rooms, bulletin boards, affinity web sites, podcasts, social networking, fan sites, mash-ups, and virtual worlds.

This policy is intended to provide guidelines for:

- a) The use of social networking and social media on behalf of the City of Westminster, and
- b) The personal use of social networking and social media as an employee of the City of Westminster.

To address the fast-changing landscape of the Internet and the way residents communicate and obtain information online, the City uses social media tools to reach a broader audience. The City encourages the use of social media to further the goals of the City, and to engage the community we serve.

The City also understands that its employees use social media sites to share events in their own lives, and to communicate and discuss their opinions with others, including family, friends, and co-workers. However, the use of social media may present certain risks and therefore carries certain responsibilities. To assist employees in making responsible decisions about their use of social media, the City has established this policy to guide appropriate use of social media.

Employees must never use City electronic communication resources, or work time, for personal social media use. Furthermore, employees may not use City email addresses to register on social networks, blogs, or other online tools utilized for personal use.

A copy of this policy will be made available to all City employees. All employees using social media sites are directed to familiarize themselves with the policy. Employees' use of social media sites for official business is governed by this policy as well as applicable City Rules and Regulations. Violation of this policy may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination.

### **THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON BEHALF OF THE CITY**

#### **1. Furthering the City's Mission**

Social media platforms offer many advantages – they help us open up government to encourage citizen participation, strengthen our community, and support a civic culture. The use of social media platforms allows the City to:

- Expand communication through these networks and distribution systems;
- Increase transparency of government;
- Enable response to problems;

- Listen to the community – enabling us to improve services, programs, practices - and let them know they are being heard; and
- Provide helpful information.

## 2. Rules about City Social Media Accounts

- The City’s website at [www.westminster-ca.gov](http://www.westminster-ca.gov) will remain the City’s primary and predominant internet presence.
- No City Department nor individual may establish a City Social Media Site without prior approval from the City Manager.
- Any employee posting to City Social Media Sites or making content changes to the City’s website must be authorized to do so by their supervisor or department head.
- City Social Media Sites should make clear that they are maintained by the City and that they follow this policy.
- All City Social Media Sites shall adhere to applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and policies.
- All City Social Media Sites are subject to the California Public Records Act. Therefore, any content maintained in a Social Media format that is related to city business, including a list of subscribers, posted communication, and communications submitted for posting, may be a public record subject to public disclosure. This requirement may not be changed to exclude social media content.
- The City reserves the right to restrict or remove any content that is deemed in violation of this policy or any applicable law.
- All City Social Media Sites shall contain the “Commenting Notice” and clearly indicate that any content posted is subject to public disclosure. The City reserves the right to restrict or remove any content that is deemed in violation of this policy, the Commenting Notice, or any applicable law as it applies to comments.

## 3. Originating Posts

Only content that is appropriate for public release, that supports the City’s mission, and conforms to all policies regarding the release of information may be posted on any of the City’s Social Media Sites. Examples of appropriate content include:

- Announcements;
- Requests for participation, e.g., community meetings, recreational events, etc.;
- Traffic or road closure information stemming from capital improvements, signal outages, maintenance, etc.;
- Press releases;
- Recruitment of personnel;
- Personnel engaging in job activities;
- Community activities that may not be City-sponsored, but are open to the public, e.g., TET Parade;
- Shared information from other local government agencies impacting residents, e.g., OCFA, Midway Sanitation District, Westminster School District, etc.;
- Public health and safety tips or recommendations from another government agency, e.g., CDC or FBI that are directly relevant to the community. *Note: no social media posting should be worded or visually depicted to induce feelings of fear or immediate threat. See “Crisis Communications” for more information;*
- Pictures taken from within the city that portray a positive, unique, or engaging image of the community or environment; and

- Sharing accolades or awards for Westminster residents or businesses published in local newspapers.

#### 4. Social Media Engagement Guidelines on City Social Media Sites

- *What you write is ultimately your responsibility.* Participation in social computing on behalf of the City is not a right and it therefore needs to be taken seriously and with respect. When responding, be sure you're the correct person in your department.
- *It's a conversation.* Talk to your readers like you'd talk to real people if they called you at work. Avoid bureaucratic or formal language. Don't be afraid to bring in your own personality, but remain professional – don't be combative.
- *Be open.* One of the great benefits of social media is the interaction between us (you) and our customers. Take in ideas. Share relevant feedback and input with relevant colleagues. When in doubt, talk to your department head.
- *Are you adding value?* Communication should help our residents, employees, and others in the region. Adding phone numbers, websites, or other resources and points of contact can also be useful.
- *Be transparent.* Your honesty, or dishonesty, will be quickly noticed in social media environments. When commenting about your work, use your real name, identify that you work for the City, and be clear about your role.
- *Be careful of tone.* Tone is hard to read online and people often assume the worst. Aim to be light-hearted and helpful.
- *Perception is reality.* In online social networks, the lines between public and private, personal and professional are blurred. Just by identifying yourself as a Westminster employee, you are creating perceptions about the City. Be sure all content associated with you is consistent with your work and with the City's values and professional standards.
- *Be judicious.* All statements must be true and not misleading. Strive for accuracy and full disclosure in any post.
- *Don't post rumors.* Never post information or rumor that you know to be false about the City, City employees, City partners, or City clients.
- *Did you screw up?* If you make a mistake, admit it. Be upfront and quick with your correction. You may choose to modify an earlier post; just make it clear that you have done so.
- *If it gives you pause, hold off.* If you're about to publish something that makes you even the slightest bit uncomfortable, stop. Take a minute to review this policy and try to figure out what's bothering you, then fix it. If you're still unsure, check with your department head. Ultimately, the decision about what you publish is yours, as is the responsibility. So be sure.
- *When posting your comments, refrain from posting about controversial or potentially inflammatory subjects,* including but not limited to politics, sex, religion, or any other non-business related subjects. Never disclose proprietary or confidential information.
- *Be wary of "trolling" activity or other negative engagement.* If you have offered help and resources to someone expressing a frustration without success, no further engagement is appropriate.

- See something, say something. If you are concerned with any threatening or disturbing language or behavior of any kind, do not keep it to yourself. Contact your supervisor or the Westminster Police Department immediately.
- Follow the rules. Employees who fail to comply with this policy when posting on behalf of the City are subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

## 5. Use of Images

Credit for images or information externally sourced should be given on the post. Written permission to use a specific, identifiable image of a person, besides a City employee, should be obtained prior to posting when possible.

## 6. City Websites

City websites offer an opportunity to provide insight and transparency on City operations. Though City websites may not be as well suited to interaction as a social media account, they remain a critical forum for communication. City websites are the appropriate place for in-depth information, resources, and tools that improve transparency and foster understanding of the City's mission and operations. Content on City websites, though more detailed and abundant, should generally uphold the same guidelines as social media posts: be helpful, responsible, respectful, and transparent.

## 7. Crisis Communications

In the event of an emergency, all employees with access to City social media accounts should limit messaging to public safety and/or disaster related services instructions. Content should be clear, concise, and instructional. Posts may include those previously published by the Westminster Police Department or other leading public safety organizations, such as the Orange County Fire Authority or the Orange County Sheriff's Department, or new content from City departments such as the water utility or other public works-related safety notices. Every effort should be made to cancel previously scheduled posts that are not relevant to public safety.

## 8. Commenting Notice on City Social Media Accounts

By its nature, social media sites allow for a participatory, interactive experience, with members of these sites being able to comment or respond to information posted on the City's behalf. The City is committed to serving our community in a civil and unbiased manner. To ensure that this commitment is fulfilled, the City has established this comment notice with regards to comments and content from third parties posted on City Social Media Sites.

Comments containing any of the following inappropriate forms of content shall not be permitted on any City Social Media Sites and are subject to removal and/or restriction:

- Comments not related to the original topic, including random or unintelligible comments;
- Profane, obscene, violent, sexual, or pornographic content and/or language;
- Content that promotes, fosters, or perpetuates discrimination on the basis of race, creed, color, age, religion, gender, marital status, national origin, status with regard to public assistance, physical or mental disability, or sexual orientation;
- Libelous, defamatory, or personal attacks or comments;
- Threats of violence or illegal activity to any person or organization;
- Comments infringing on copyrighted or trademarked material;



- Solicitations of commerce;
- Comments in support of, or in opposition to, any political candidate, campaign, ballot measure, or proposition;
- Encouragement of illegal activity;
- Information that may tend to compromise the safety or security of the general public;
- Information revealing private data of any person such as addresses, credit card information, medical information, financial information, social security numbers, etc.;
- Comments containing specific or imminent threats; and
- Links leading to any of the above inappropriate forms of content.

Comments made by individuals who are not employees of the City are the expressed opinions of those individuals, and the availability of these comments on City Social Media Sites does not imply any endorsement of nor agreement to by the City, nor do these comments necessarily reflect the opinions or policies of the City.

The City reserves the right to deny access to a City social media site to any individual who violates the City's social media policy and/or commenting notice without prior notice, at any time.

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*Commenting Notice to be posted on all City Social Media Sites:*

*The City's Social Media Sites are intended to serve as a forum for communication between the public and the City of Westminster. The City reserves the right to restrict or remove inappropriate comments including those that include obscene language or sexual content, threaten or defame any person or organization, violate intellectual property rights or the legal ownership interest of another party, support or oppose political candidates or ballot propositions, encourage illegal activity, promote commercial services or products, or are not topically related to the particular posting. Comments made by individuals are the expressed opinions of those individuals, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions or policies of the City.*

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## **CODE OF CONDUCT & GUIDELINES FOR CITY EMPLOYEES AND PERSONAL SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS**

The following guidelines apply to City employees when posting to personal sites other than the City's Social Media Sites. Employees who violate this policy may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

### **1. Confidentiality**

- Do not discuss privileged or other confidential City information, including preliminary plans, interim strategies, pending or anticipated litigation, or personnel matters.

## **2. Responsibility**

- Employees are personally responsible for the content they publish on wikis, blogs, videos, or any other form of social media related to the City's business. Do not post slurs, personal attacks, or threats of harm.
- Don't infringe on copyrights or trademarks. Cite the source of information if it is not your own thought or idea.
- If posting to personal networking or social media sites and speaking about job-related content or about the City, authors can identify themselves as a City employee but should make it clear that you are not speaking on behalf of the City. It's best to use a disclaimer such as *"The opinions expressed on the site are my own and do not necessarily reflect the views of the City."*
- Many social media sites blur the lines between business and personal. Keep this in mind and make sure to have a balance of information that clarifies the author's professional and personal viewpoints.

## **3. Respect**

- Use common sense when posting on social media sites; remember that what you write is public, may be public for a long time, and may spread to large audiences. Refrain from posting information that you would not want your supervisor or other employees to read or that you would be embarrassed to see in the newspaper or on television.
- If you see disrespectful opinions, negative comments, or criticism about yourself or the City and its employees, do not try to have the post removed (unless the post violates this policy or the commenting notice); do not send a reply that may escalate the situation.

## **4. Other Guidelines and Advice**

Use good and ethical judgment. To the extent your social media use impacts City employees and clients, follow City policies and regulations as applicable, including but not limited to those that protect individual privacy rights, anti-discrimination and harassment policies, the anti-violence policy, and other relevant City policies.

Keep in mind that if your conduct adversely affects your job performance or the performance of your co-workers; is detrimental to the mission and function of the City; or otherwise adversely affects members of the public served by the City, people who work on behalf of the City, or the City's legitimate business interests, the City may take disciplinary action against you up to and including termination.

Further, keep in mind that you are more likely to resolve work-related complaints by speaking directly with your co-workers or via other channels such as speaking with the City's Human Resources Department, discussing concerns with your supervisor, or by filing an internal complaint or grievance, if applicable. Nevertheless, if you decide to post complaints or criticism, avoid using statements, photographs, video, or audio that reasonably could be viewed as malicious, obscene, or threatening, or that might constitute harassment or bullying. Examples of such conduct might include offensive posts that could contribute to a hostile work environment on the basis of race, religious creed, color, national origin, ancestry, physical or mental disability, medical condition, genetic information, marital status, sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, age, sexual orientation, or any other status protected by law or City policy. Examples of threatening conduct include posting material that would make a reasonable person afraid for his or her safety or the safety of his or her family.